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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5731  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 8495  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 4397  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0530  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 2249  
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY PRIORITY 0699  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2001  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000959

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS; GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2018

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREF ICRC TH BM

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND ICRC DISCUSS SOUTHERN THAILAND,

REFUGEES

REF: A. BANGKOK 957 (MEETING WITH ANUPONG)  
1B. BANGKOK 845 (HIGH PROFILE BOMBINGS)

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Regional Head Christian Brunner briefed the Ambassador on ICRC activities in southern Thailand and told the Ambassador the Red Cross would continue to maintain a presence in the region despite a deadly March 15 bombing at the hotel which houses its Pattani offices. The Ambassador offered to lobby RTG officials to cooperate with the ICRC and encourage the Army to grant ICRC staff access to southern detention facilities where security officials have allegedly abused detainees. The ICRC said it was providing information gathered from Burmese along the Thai-Burma border to its Rangoon office, and that the ICRC would offer to monitor repatriated Lao Hmong refugees in Laos. End summary.

RED CROSS STAFF ESCAPE UNHARMED

12. (SBU) On March 24, the Ambassador met with International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Bangkok Regional Delegation Head Christian Brunner and Deputy Regional Head Anne Ryniker to discuss ICRC activities in Thailand and the region. The meeting took place one week following the deadly March 15 car bomb attack (reftel B) at the C.S. Pattani hotel, where for the last 15 months the ICRC had maintained an unofficial regional office with five expatriate and two local staff members. The Ambassador expressed his relief that no ICRC staff were injured in the bombing.

13. (C) Brunner explained that the ICRC was still deliberating the full extent of its presence in the South in the bombing's aftermath. He explained that the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs had refused ICRC requests to open an office in

Pattani, fearing such a move would create the perception that the conflict in the South was becoming internationalized. Brunner explained the ICRC would likely continue to maintain a presence in the South by moving to a nondescript, unmarked stand-alone property in Pattani province.

¶14. (C) Brunner emphasized the ICRC's commitment to neutrality and unbiased field work, especially when visiting prisoners in the southern provinces. According to Brunner, the ICRC received good cooperation from southern officials when visiting individuals incarcerated under the Department of Corrections' conventional prison system, and was able to visit prisoners without third parties present. However, Brunner lamented that the RTG had yet to grant the ICRC permission to visit suspected insurgents detained under provisions of martial law and the emergency decree in southern military and police facilities.

¶15. (C) The Ambassador offered to lobby Thai authorities to permit ICRC access to these detainees, explaining that he would shortly meet with Army Commander-in-Chief General Anupong Paochinda (reftel B). The Ambassador said he would urge Anupong, who had yet to reply to ICRC meeting requests, to meet with Brunner. Brunner welcomed the Ambassador's offer, and emphasized that the ICRC wanted to receive Royal Thai Army cooperation to privately visit southern detainees. The ICRC was willing to discuss with Anupong the RTG's terms for granting such access. The Ambassador agreed that granting the ICRC such access would help allay concerns in the international community and, in turn, would have the effect of reducing the internationalization of the conflict.

¶16. (C) Brunner echoed widely-reported concerns in the human rights community that security forces sometimes abuse detainees during the 37-day detention period permitted under provisions of martial law and the emergency decree. According to Brunner, 90% of suspected insurgents arrested

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under martial law and the emergency decree are subsequently released, while the remainder still face charges in the conventional judicial system. (Comment: We believe this assessment is credible based on information received from other sources. End comment.) Brunner shared his worry that extremist religious instructors were indoctrinating some ethnic Malay Muslim children in Pondok schools (Muslim religious schools) in the South.

#### REGIONAL ICRC ACTIVITIES

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¶17. (C) Brunner briefed the Ambassador on ICRC activities in northern Thailand and Burma, explaining that Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son provincial ICRC offices provided assistance to and monitored persons who had fled Burma. Brunner said ICRC personnel along the Thai-Burma border received excellent cooperation from RTG officials, and were interviewing recently-arrived refugees to gather information on conditions in Burmese prisons. This information was then passed to the ICRC office in Rangoon, which lacked access to these facilities. Brunner said that since 2006, the ICRC has funded medical treatment for 140 Burmese victims of landmine explosions and gun shot wounds who had fled to Thailand, more than double the number in previous years. (Comment: The increase in landmine victims is consistent with reports from Dr. Cynthia's Mae Tao clinic on the Thai-Burma border. End comment.)

¶18. (C) Turning to Lao Hmong refugees, Brunner told the Ambassador that he would soon travel to Laos to propose that the ICRC monitor repatriated Hmong refugees from Thailand. Brunner explained that ICRC monitoring could perhaps be a good way for the GOL to grant such access to repatriated refugees and thus alleviate the concerns of the international community. The Ambassador said he appreciated ICRC advocacy on this issue, and noted that, should the Lao Government

agree to the ICRC proposal, it would mark a dramatic breakthrough. (Note: See septel on Embassy intervention on Hmong refugees with the Thai military. End note.)

COMMENT

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19. (C) The ICRC remains a valuable interlocutor on conditions in southern Thailand and often receives access to individuals and groups who are off-limits to human rights NGOs and other parties. The Ambassador has urged Army Commander Anupong (reftel A) to grant the ICRC access to southern detention facilities and detainees, noting that such access will help allay concerns in the international community regarding human rights conditions in the area.

JOHN